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STATE FOR WHA A/S TOM SHANNON

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SUBJECT: TFH01: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH CONGRESSIONAL
REPRESENTATIVE AND PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE CESAR HAM

REF: TEGUCIGALPA 617

¶1. Summary: The Ambassador met with Cesar Ham, congressional representative and presidential candidate for the Democratic Union Party (UD) on October 27. Ham was accompanied by other UD leaders. Ham reasserted his support for the restitution of President Zelaya. While expressing concern for some aspects of the upcoming elections, Ham recognized the inevitability of the November 29 general elections and expressed the UD's desire to participate fully in the process. The Ambassador restated USG support for the restoration of democracy through a negotiated agreement - one not imposed by the United States or anyone else - and encouraged the UD to participate in the elections and not lose a historic opportunity. End summary.

¶2. Cesar Ham, a vocal supporter of President Zelaya's push for a constituent assembly before the coup and ardent opponent of the coup since, requested the meeting to convey the UD point of view regarding the crisis and the Guaymuras phase of negotiations (Note: Ham joined four other presidential candidates in a September visit to Costa Rica to discuss the San Jose Accord, but unlike the other candidates, did not sign the communique at the end of the trip, stating it did not go far enough to support the restoration of Zelaya to office. Following the San Jose trip, he did not join the other four candidates in their joint public statements regarding the crisis. End note). Ham was accompanied by Marvin Ponce, a UD member of Congress, and Martin Pineda, Secretary of the UD.

¶3. Ham and his colleagues restated the UD's commitment to calling for the restitution of Zelaya before the elections. They noted there was little time left to campaign and that not all candidates have been able to participate fully up to now. They worried about the suspension of the dialogue and the position of the Micheletti regime that appears to put elections before all else. They noted the residual effects of the decree that suspended civil liberties, and that conditions for the elections remained poor. Pineda said that many people were wondering if Zelaya could possibly return before the elections, and that this question created much doubt and uncertainty among voters. Ham and colleagues expressed a desire to know Zelaya's position on what might happen without restitution. They said that they have been unable to contact Zelaya directly and asked the Ambassador to talk with him.

¶4. Despite these concerns, Ham said that he and the UD, in the end, want elections, they being central to democracy. He noted that the elections appeared to be organized and progressing well. Ham said

people could and should continue to fight with their vote rather than with arms. His colleagues recognized that the UD is positioned like never before for significant gains in congressional seats, and that to boycott the elections or withdraw would mean passing up a historic opportunity. After all, noted Ham, the UD is fighting for democracy and the ability to promote the UD's agenda, not Zelaya. An appeal to Zelaya could unlock the possibility of an international electoral observation mission, which would be critical, according to the UD, to guaranteeing a clean election. In the end, Ham and his UD colleagues asked what they could do to help forward a resolution to the crisis and ensure free and fair elections.

15. The Ambassador, for his part, emphasized that the USG position has been consistent from the outset - to support restitution and reestablishment of the democratic order. He noted the support for the OAS and the tough measures that have been taken to pressure the de facto regime and their allies to negotiate. However, the Ambassador also noted the complexity of the situation, the many errors of President Zelaya, and for these reasons the USG supported a negotiated solution. The Ambassador said that with such an accord, support for the elections, including an international electoral observation mission, would be realized. He noted the inevitability of and popular support for the elections, and that the UD should focus on the opportunity presented rather than the opportunity lost.

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